

## **USDA Farm to School Team Site Visit: Burlington School District in Burlington, Vermont**

When it comes to Farm to School, Burlington School District (BSD) applies the “three C” approach: *cafeteria, classroom, and community*. With over ten years of Farm to School experience under their belts, BSD staff stands by this time tested approach as a key ingredient in their recipe for success.

On May 11–12, 2010, the USDA Farm to School Team traveled to Burlington, Vermont to visit with BSD’s food service staff, teachers, advocates, farmers, local business managers and others, to learn about the successes and challenges of their Farm to School efforts. Burlington was the second stop on the Team’s tour of fifteen school districts across the country to learn more about Farm to School initiatives.

BSD serves the City of Burlington, on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain in northwest Vermont. In 2009–10, the district enrolled approximately 3,600 K–12 students, and served an average of 2,500 lunches per day. Forty-eight percent of BSD students receive free or reduced price meals. The district uses self-operating kitchens to prepare and serve meals, and many fresh products are centrally processed in the high school kitchen, which is the largest kitchen in the district.

In order to bring fresh, local food to the cafeteria, the district sources both directly from growers and through its regular distributors. Additionally, BSD utilizes staff and volunteer time to process local foods during the summer months when the product is in season and stores the products for use throughout the school year. This helps ensure local products are available during the colder months. Local food purchases vary from zucchini to chicken. BSD also makes its own nut-free locally-sourced granola and cheddar cheese rolls from local products. In total, the district purchases over 30 locally grown or raised products.

Integrating Farm to School into the classroom is a top priority at BSD, and students receive nutrition and agriculture education in different ways. At various schools throughout the district, staff and lunchroom volunteers model good food choices and help students make choices at the salad bar. Other examples include schools incorporating Farm to School into their lesson plans and offering an after school garden club. Being environmentally conscious, most schools also sort waste into trash, recyclables and compost items.

Strong community partnerships are vital to the Farm to School success in BSD. Local non-profit organizations have obtained grants to provide educational opportunities to students and promote community awareness and involvement in Farm to School activities. Through these partnerships, students are able to take educational trips to nearby farms, compete in a statewide “Jr. Iron Chef” healthy cooking contest, work in school gardens, meet the farmers that grow their

food, and more. BSD employs a fulltime Farm to School coordinator, helping the district stay engaged with their numerous community partners.

In BSD, Farm to School is integrated in the classroom, community, and cafeteria. It's clear that this strategy is helping the BSD cook up a local food success story.

Doug Davis has been the Food Service Director for Burlington Public Schools for thirteen years. Doug comes from a culinary background and defines his school food service operation as "whole, fresh, and local". Here are some tips from Doug on how to get started with Farm to School:

1. Schools should begin with a self-assessment, including equipment, personnel and purchasing, before taking action.
2. Take slow deliberate steps and be willing to repeat steps to get them right.
3. "Process before product." Have plans in place to prepare, market, and serve new products before you begin the procurement process.
4. Taste test everything with the students before making it a regular menu item.
5. Communicate and build relationships with key stakeholders, including farmers, school administration, community partners, students, and more.